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ABSTRACT

Based on a series of faculty workshops conducted at Jefferson Community College (KY) in 1978 and 1980, this handbook outlines 95 practical suggestions for increasing student retention rates. After introductory material describing these workshops, the first 22 suggestions recommend ways to foster positive student/teacher interaction. Methods are suggested by which teachers can familiarize themselves with individual students, establish effective communication in the classroom, and openly recognize student contributions. The next 37 suggestions emphasize effective classroom management through the clear delineation of class objectives, student responsibilities, and course content, as well as through the use of proper instructional and evaluation techniques. Methods of encouraging cooperative, rather than competitive, relations among students are presented in the next seven suggestions. The handbook then delineates 24 suggestions for faculty-initiated activities that enhance student learning, including establishing personal contact with students experiencing difficulty and using the expertise of other instructors. The final 11 suggestions present strategies for increasing administrative involvement in the teaching/learning process. (JP)

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Recruitment, Retention, Attrition Project

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Dr. RONALD J. HORVATH, DIRECTOR

JEFFERSON COMMUNITY COLLEGE
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To:

From: Ronald J. Horvath, Director

Re: JCC Recruitment, Retention, Attrition Project

Thank you very much for your inquiry about JCC's RRA Project. Let me describe for your briefly the scope of the project.

Background

Our ability to produce institutional research data and several semesters of declining enrollments were the two factors which prompted an extensive study of our "in-class" attrition. On a college-wide basis, we found that approximately 40% of our class enrollments received either a failing grade or withdrew from the course. All individual sections were studied for both fall 1977 and spring 1978.

The data were subdivided by class sections, departments, and divisions. In the spring of 1978, we met individually with the Division Chairperson to discuss the data for his/her Division. From these meetings, an overall strategy was developed to attack the problem. The strategy was based on these simple assumptions:

1. An overall class attrition rate of 40% was too high, even though it matched the national average.

2. Faculty members themselves would be our best resource to help reduce the 40% rate.

3. Class attrition would be an excellent starting point to examine the entire process of recruitment, retention, and attrition.

Group Processes

A series of four (4) Workshops was established for the faculty. The first one, held in July, 1978, focused on the overall problem and introduced the faculty to the general plan for the RRA Project.

The essence of the general plan was to look at the RRA process from the student's point of view.

I Pre-Enrollment Phase
II College Enrollment Phase
III Class Attendance Phase
IV Post-Class Phase

Faculty workshops focusing on a specific topic were scheduled in August, September, and October following the monthly faculty meeting. Faculty were randomly assigned to groups of 8-10 with a Moderator and Recorder assigned. Each group dealt with the specific topic for an hour and then filed a written report to my office. The written reports were edited, published, and distributed to the faculty. The primary outcome of the project was a Handbook entitled Ninety-Five Practical Suggestions to Guarantee Student and Teacher Success.

Conclusion

Many of the specific suggestions generated by the faculty group process have been implemented or are being worked on. The most encouraging result so far has been the positive attitude of the faculty toward the entire process. The "awareness level" has been raised considerably by the fact that we are relying on ourselves for solutions to problems that are our own.

Our follow-up studies have shown (after five semesters) that our in-class attrition rate has dropped from 40% to 31%. That's success! Our enrollment has also increased each semester since fall 1978, and our retention rate from semester-to-semester has increased from 60 to 65%.

RJH:pam

FULL CLASSROOMS:
95 Practical Suggestions to Guarantee Student and Teacher Success

1980
Jefferson Community College
University of Kentucky

One thousand two-hundred years of college teaching experiences are recorded and reflected in this practical guide for classroom teachers. The Handbook is a product of the Jefferson Community College (Louisville, Kentucky) faculty efforts which were generated through mini-discussion groups in the fall of 1978 and again in the fall of 1980.

From the twelve (12) mini-groups which met and exchanged ideas, we received approximately 125 suggestions. After duplications were deleted, ideas combined, and some slight editing, we were able to identify ninety-five (95) positive suggestions for faculty use in dealing with problems of Retention/Attrition.

The 95 ideas were subdivided into five general categories:

I. Faculty/Student Interaction
II. General Classroom Management
III. Student Initiated Activities
IV. Faculty Initiated Activities
V. Administrative Support

Once again, the Handbook is a product of the faculty's collective ideas, judgments, and past experiences. Although every idea cannot be used by every faculty member (styles differ), we have demonstrated that we ourselves are our best resource in creating a positive learning environment.

Ronald J. Horvath
Jefferson Community College
Louisville, Kentucky

FULL CLASSROOMS: 95 PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS TO GUARANTEE STUDENT AND TEACHER SUCCESS

I. FACULTY/STUDENT INTERACTION

Operational Definition - This category contains elements directly related to the affective domain of student growth brought about by faculty/student interaction. Psyche, ego, individual worth are all intricately bound within this framework.

1. Tell the students by what name and title you prefer to be called (Prof., Dr., Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms., first name).

2. Learn the name of each student as quickly as possible and use the student's name in class. Based upon your own style, student preference, and the classroom atmosphere you want to create.
   A. Call on students by their first names or nicknames.
   B. Call on students by using Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms.
   C. Avoid referring to students in condescending terms.

3. Be aware of the differences and similarities between students' classroom mistakes and their personal successes/failures.

4. Be fair and impartial in dealing with students both in and out of class.

5. Be honest about your feelings, opinions, and attitudes toward students and toward your subject matter.

6. Listen intently to student comments and opinions. Use a "lateral thinking technique" (adding to ideas rather than dismissing them) so that students feel their ideas, comments, and opinions are worthwhile. This approach permits you to consider all viewpoints.

7. Don't quarrel with students over a minor point in class; avoid the appearance of rigidity.

8. If a student tell you something in confidence, respect that confidence. Avoid making value judgments (verbally or non-verbally) about these confidences.

9. Lend some of your books (reference) to students and borrow some of theirs in return. You can initiate the process by saying, "I've just read a great book on____; would anyone like to borrow it?"

10. Give your telephone number to students, your office hours, and the location of your office. Advise students to leave messages with the division secretary if they are unable to contact you.

11. Provide a small note pad on your office door so students can leave messages if you are not in.

12. At first class meeting, pair up the students and have them get acquainted with one another. Switch partners every five (5) minutes. Faculty should participate. Have students introduce one another to the entire class.

13. Have the students establish a "buddy" system for absences, work missed, assignments, tutoring, etc. Exchange telephone numbers; pair them by major or geographical proximity (zip codes).

14. At the end of each class period, ask one student to stay for a minute to chat (compliment him/her on something; tell student you missed him/her if absent, etc.).

15. Instead of returning tests, quizzes, themes in class, ask students to stop by your office to pick them up. This also presents an opportunity to talk informally with students and to determine the location of your office.

16. Call students on the telephone if they are absent. Make an appointment with them to discuss attendance, make-up work, etc. If you cannot contact them by telephone, drop them a short letter or postcard.

17. Get feedback periodically from students on their perceptions of your attitudes toward them, your personal involvement, etc.

18. Socialize with students as your "style" permits by attending their club or social activities, by walking with them between classes, etc.

19. Take a student or a group of students to lunch (dutch treat).

20. Conduct a personal conference with all students sometime during the semester.

21. Provide some means to establish quick, positive reinforcement to students within the first few class periods.

22. Throughout the course, but particularly during the crucial first class sessions:
    A. Stress a positive "you can handle it" attitude.
    B. Emphasize your willingness to give individual help with course content.
    Point out the relevance of your subject matter to the concerns and goals of your students.
    C. Capitalize on opportunities to praise the abilities and contributions of students whose status in the course is in doubt; well-timed encouragement could mean the difference between retention and attrition.
    D. Utilize a variety of instructional methods, drawing on appropriate audio-visual aids as much as possible.
    E. Urge students to talk to you about problems, such as changes in work schedule, before dropping your course. Alternative arrangements can often be made, if arrangements cannot be made, explain proper procedures to withdraw.

II. GENERAL CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Operational Definition - This section focuses literally on the day-to-day operations of your classes. The items as a group emphasize planning, orderliness, and general good sense.

1. Conduct a full instructional period on the first day of classes. This activity sets a positive tone for the learning enviornment you want to set. Engage in some interpersonal activities listed elsewhere or ask the students to submit areas that they would like to learn about during the semester.

2. List and discuss your course objectives on the first day. Let students know how your course can fit their personal/career goals. Discuss some of the fears and apprehensions that both you and the students have. Tell them what they should expect of you and how you will contribute to their learning. Remind them again three or four weeks later.

3. Provide a course outline for each student; include required and optional textbooks, assignments, grading policies, attendance rules, etc.

4. Have students fill out an index card with name, address, telephone number, goals, and other personal information you or they think is important. Ask them to provide a list of the times they are available to meet with you.

5. Tell the students (orally and in writing) what your attendance policy is. Make them aware of your deep concern for attendance and remind them periodically of the policy and the concern.

6. Insist that students contact you or the division secretary if they are going to be absent for more than one class period.

7. Explain clearly student responsibilities for missed classes, exams, late papers, etc.

8. Be flexible when scheduling make-up tests and quizzes; students may have other classes.

9. If you had to miss a class, explain why and what you will do to make up the time and/or materials.

10. If you are absent because of illness or an emergency, telephone your chairperson; ask that the division secretary or a colleague post a note on your classroom door.

11. At the beginning of each class period, announce your topic of the day and your objectives.

12. Distribute an outline of your lecture notes before class starts. This approach assists students in organizing the material you are presenting and impels you to present your material in an orderly manner.

13. Get to class before the students arrive; be the last one to leave. Meet all of your classes as scheduled.

14. Circulate around the class as you talk or ask questions. This movement creates a physical closeness to the students. Avoid standing behind the lectern or sitting behind the desk for the entire period. Do not allow the room design or furniture arrangement to set up artificial barriers between you and the students.

15. Maintain good eye contact with students; this is extremely important both in and out of class.

16. Vary your instructional techniques (lecture, discussion, debate, small groups, films, etc.).

17. Use familiar examples in presenting materials. If you teach rules, principles, definitions, and theorems, explicate these with concrete examples that students can understand.

18. Be prepared to use an alternate approach if the one you've chosen seems to bog down. You should be confident enough with your own material so that student interests and concerns, not lecture notes, determine the format of instruction. Remember one approach may work well with one group, but not with another. Each class generates its own "personality" and leadership.

19. Let students know that the learning resources you use in class (slides, tapes, films) are available to them outside of class. Explain the procedures to secure the material and take them to the location (learning resource center, study skills, etc.).

20. If you require a term paper or research paper, you should take the responsibility of arranging a library orientation. Librarians are happy to cooperate.

21. If the subject matter is appropriate, use a pre-test to determine their knowledge, background, expertise, etc.

22. Devise the first test of the semester to cover a small unit -- fewer topics to study, fewer test questions, etc.

23. Be sure your tests cover the most important aspects of the unit and course. Explain your philosophy and purpose of testing.

24. Return tests, quizzes, and papers as soon as possible. Write comments (+ and -) when appropriate. Explain verbally or in writing the errors that students made.

25. Ask students to evaluate your test either at the end of the test or during the next class period.

26. Explain thoroughly (orally and in writing) your grading methods and procedures. Remind students of those procedures when you return tests, themes, research papers, etc.

27. As often as you can and in as many ways as you can, show your concern for the students' progress in the course.

28. Give each student a mid-term grade and indicate what each student must do to improve; a mid-term conference may be needed.

29. Have the counselors visit your classes to foster awareness of counseling and placement services. Also, reading faculty will volunteer to review the SQ4R (survey, question, read, recite, rite, review) method of studying your test.

30. Let students know that you are able and willing to discuss study techniques and habits for your course.

31. Tell students directly when it is appropriate or inappropriate to ask questions in class or during a lecture. If you tell them it's ok to ask a question when you are lecturing, don't be annoyed if they do!

32. Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know all the answers to questions that students raise.

33. Help students feel free to ask questions. When you answer a student's question, be sure he/she understands your answer. Make the student repeat the answer in his/her own words.

34. Provide positive reinforcement whenever possible; give students a respectful answer to any question they might ask.

35. Clarify and have students understand what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior in a classroom. Be consistent in enforcing your rules. Seek administrative assistance if problems persist.

36. Allow students to switch classes if work schedules change or other salient reasons develop. Cooperate with a colleague if he/she makes such a request.

37. Refer untimely withdrawals to counseling for future follow-up.

III. STUDENT INITIATED ACTIVITIES

Operational Definition - This category is based on the premise that peer influence can and does play a substantial role in student success. Age differences, personality differences, and skill differences can be utilized to produce positive results if you can get the students to work cooperatively with one another, rather than competitively.

1. Have students read one another's papers before they turn them in. This activity helps them locate one another's errors before being graded.

2. If the class lends itself to a field trip, have the students plan it and make some or all of the arrangements.

3. Ask students to submit sample test questions (objective or subjective) prior to a test. The class itself can compose a test or quiz based on your objectives.

4. Create opportunities for student leaders to emerge in class. Use these leadership skills to improve student performance.

5. Encourage students to report their experiences if they have used support services such as study skills, counseling, placement, etc.

6. Have students set specific goals for themselves throughout the semester in terms of their learning and what responsibilities they will undertake.

7. Permit and encourage students to bring a friend to class.

8. Encourage study groups (a form of peer tutoring). Emphasize the fact that students are not competing with one another, but that they can learn from one another.

9. Provide students with a list of class names, addresses, and telephone numbers (with permission) to encourage out-of-class contacts.

10. Encourage peer grading of essays, papers, or tests.

11. Invite students to read their papers (or summaries) to the class.

IV. FACULTY INITIATED ACTIVITIES

Operational Definition - This section presents the greatest challenge to the ability and creativity of each faculty member. You must take the intiative to implement these suggestions, to test them, and to revise others.

1. Utilize small group discussions in class whenever feasible. Identify a goal to be achieved through the discussion.

2. Take the initiative to contact and meet with students who are doing poor work. Be especially cognizant of the "passive" student, one who comes to class, sits quietly, does not participate, but does poorly on tests, quizzes, etc.

3. Encourage students who had the first semester of a course together to be in the second semester together. Try to schedule the same time slot for the second semester.

4. Throughout the semester have students submit topics that they would like to cover or discuss.

5. Take students on a mini-tour of the learning resources center, reading/study skills area, natural science learning lab, counseling center, etc. If a particular student needs reading/study skills help, don't send him/her. TAKE HIM/HER!

6. Encourage students to attend cultural activities and to participate in extra-curricular activities. Give recognition and/or rewards for meaningful participation.

7. Use your imagination; devise ways to reinforce positively student accomplishments. Try to avoid placing students in embarrassing situations, particularly in class. Be patient with them when they don't understand the material.

8. Use your background, experience, and knowledge to inter-relate your subject matter with other academic disciplines. Show enthusiasm for your subject matter and for your students.

9. Use examples that include the experiences of all age groups in your classes.

10. Create situations in which students can help you (locate information in the library, check out a book for you from the library, look up some reference material, conduct a class research project).

11. Develop library/supplementary reading lists which complement course content. Select books at various reading levels.

12. Use the library reference shelf for some of your old tests and quizzes. Tell the students that you will use some questions from the old tests in their next test.

13. Place study guides and lecture notes in a file in the library and/or study skills center.

14. Engage in periodic (bi-weekly) self-evaluation of each class. What was accomplished? How did student react? Random student evaluations (mini-forms) could also be used.

15. Set up special tutoring sessions and extra classes. Make these activities mandatory, especially for students who are doing poorly.

16. Maintain academic standards; be sure students understand this.

17. Look at your record book periodically to determine student progress (inform them) and determine for yourself if you know anything about that student other than his/her grades.

18. At mid-term and at final exam, your last test question should ask if a student is going to remain in college or drop out at the end of the semester. If a potential drop-out is identified, you can advise the student personally or work with a divisional counselor.

19. Work with your divisional counselor to discuss procedures to follow-up absentees, failing students, etc.

20. Utilize the skills of other faculty members as guest lecturers and discussion leaders. Switch classes on occasion.

21. Confer with other faculty members who have the same students in class. Focus on student learning problems, observed behavior, positive responses, etc.

22. Team teach a class with a colleague or switch classes for a period or two. Invite a guest lecturer to class.

23. Invite reading/study skills faculty to your classes to discuss study habits, techniques.

24. Ask the reading faculty to do a "readability study" of the texts you use in your courses.

V. ADMINISTRATIVE ACTIVITIES

Operational Definition - This section presents techniques and strategies to insure administrative involvement in the teaching/learning process.

1. Make the campus an attractive place in which to learn. Be sure that faculty and students share in the responsibility for maintaining a wholesome atmosphere.

2. Encourage administrators to teach classes or to substitute in classes when a faculty member attends a professional meeting.

3. Ask an administrator to participate in a classroom panel discussion or to guest lecture.

4. Hold administrators, division chairpersons, and program coordinators responsible for the quality of instruction provided by part-time faculty. Insist on the same standards that are applied to full-time faculty.

5. Involve top-level administrators in freshman orientation sessions.

6. Arrange informal meetings among administrators, faculty and students.

7. Actively support the faculty's class attendance policies.

8. Furnish name tags for all faculty and staff who work at registration or in group advising.

9. Provide free day care/babysitting service during registration.

10. Distribute information to faculty on research pertaining to student successes/failures.

11. Use administrators as advisers for students.